THE WORLD IN FIGURES

After I had completed my memoirs for Grzhebin's *Annals*, we still had some savings but no plans for the future. I thought of returning to scientific work in economics and statistics but, after so many stormy years, it was difficult to pick up the lost threads.

Christmas, 1924, was approaching, but there was no snow in Berlin. Emma and I longed for real winter, as we had known it in Siberia, and decided to spend Christmas week in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia.

On the train I tried to take stock of what I remembered of economics. I thought primarily of descriptive economics rather than abstract theory. . . . I had not followed the literature since 1905. . . . All had changed since then. . . . I would have to learn from scratch, proceeding systematically: population, the labor force, agriculture, industry, trade. . . . Then it dawned on me that many people were in a similar position. War and revolution had swept through the world and broken the continuity of its development. All students had to catch up with events. The best way to bridge the gulf between the past and present was to try to measure the changes. I could do it by reading, studying, and writing, all at the same time. I said to Emma, "I think I know what I want to do. This will be a book on the changes that have occurred in the world in the last two decades—a statistical book covering everything that can be measured." I could not sleep that night. By dawn I had a general plan ready.

Marienbad was buried under snow. We had a room on the second floor of a boardinghouse, with an entrance from an open balcony and a view of snow-covered hills. We spent most of our time outdoors, coasting or hiking and having a wonderful time. Back in our room in the evening, I scribbled a detailed outline of the project, a seven-volume study entitled *Die Welt in Zahlen* (*The World in Figures*).

I intended to write in Russian and offered the project to Grzhebin, but his business wasn't prospering. The Soviet government had barred the import of his books to Russia. Thus we started without a publisher in sight. We worked in the library of the Prussian Statistical Board. By the time the first volume—some three hundred pages in pencil draft—was completed, the Russian department of the publishing house of Rudolf Mosse had become interested in the project.

The main business of Mosse was the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*, the largest daily newspaper in Germany, but the firm also published books as a sideline. The Russian department was a small branch of a big business, and we did not take its interest in our project too seriously. But its manager, a Russian refugee lawyer, believed he could sell the idea to the German director and asked me to let him